



PRECISENESS OF SELF-LEARNING MATERIAL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: LEARNERS VIEWPOINT

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ABSTRACT

Self-learning Materials (SLM) play a major role in the teaching-learning process at all levels of education and training. As often many of the learners pursuing teacher education programme in special education through open and distance mode of learning. The article sought the opinion of the learners on the preciseness of the study material catered to them. Preciseness as defined in this study is the comprehensibility of the material in use. Both academic and physical aspects of self-learning material have been studied. The academic aspects include selection, organization and presentation of content with an overview of language, pacing, illustration, exercise & assignments. Whereas physical aspects of self-learning materials include printing, lay-out & get-up, durability, and size. This particular section of the stake holders were chose to deep deal in learner friendliness of the material. The sampling was incidental-purposive and a descriptive survey method was used.

KEY WORDS: Special education training programme, Self-learning material, open distance learning.

Open and distance education has been accepted as an effective and viable alternative to formal education system all over the world. It is an institutional concept of education which focuses self-directed learning by form of correspondence courses with an integrated element of communication technology and facilitated with tutorial sessions and guided seminars. The content of such courses do not differ from the regular course work but the difference of learning experience arises from the presentation of the course materials.

Self-learning materials (SLM) play a major role in the teaching-learning process at all levels of education and training. They are materials specifically designed to enable learners to study partly or wholly by themselves and have been described as Tutorial-In-Print. UNESCO (2002 a, b) clearly mentioned that the learning materials and resources are essential components in all distance learning systems. Comprehensive, well designed materials may stimulate self-directed learning and thus influence the quality of the system as a whole. Design, development and production of materials are often considered as a sub-system in distance teaching organizations. Text-books, software etc. may be used but in most cases each programme benefits from having specifically designed learning materials. Findings of Recchia & Puig (2011) revealed that including a self-contained setting as one of several field experiences encouraged future teachers to think flexibly about teaching children with special needs while enhancing their understanding of the principles behind the continuum of services. Studies support that learners gain more knowledge, retain more information, and perform far better when teaching styles match learning styles (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000).

The study sought the opinion of the learners pursuing B.Ed. special education (Visual Impairment) through distance mode. The choice of this particular section of sample unit solved a dual purpose. While at one point it serves the purpose of an evaluative study which can guide to make required changes from the learners point of view, at the other it provides deep insight on the quality of learners pursuing a career as a special educator and their commitment to help the persons with disability. The researchers sought the answers to the following research questions:

- Whether the self-learning material captures the interest of the learners?
- What is the viewpoint of the learners towards pacing, language and content of self-learning materials?
- Whether the learners are aware about the learning material availability in disability friendly formats?

Method

The study is an evaluative one. A cross-sectional survey was used to gather information for the study. The survey is a non-experimental, descriptive research method. Surveys can be useful when a researcher wants to collect data on phenomena that cannot be directly observed (Babbie, 1973). The population for the study comprises all learners of B.Ed. special education programme attending the courses through open distance learning mode in the state of West Bengal. Purposive incidental sampling was used as the sampling technique for the study. A sample of 27 learners was the data producing sample. Researcher made questionnaire on Preciseness of Self-learning Material was used for the study. There were 13 items in the questionnaire for achieving purposes of the study. Each item has four

options and respondents were asked to strike best option suits as per his/her knowledge. Two open ended questions were attached to the questionnaire which queried on the presence of disabled learners in the batch and how the learners tried to help their peers.

Result and Discussion

The first research question dealt whether the Self-learning Materials was able to capture the interest of the learners. Only 22.22 % (6) learners felt that the SLM to a great extent was able to arrest the interest where as 77.78% (21) felt that only a few papers were able to attract their interest. Evaluation at the end of the unit that helps learners to evaluate themselves was said to be available by 62.96% (17). The rest of the learners felt that either they had no knowledge of it or were not clear if it was available. To ensure effective instruction, a number of instructional design ideas are used and these help learners to acquire knowledge, intellectual skills, motor skills and necessary attitudinal changes. In this respect, learners' assessment and course evaluation are incorporated in the text. Out of the sample of 27 learners, 55.55% (15) learners had no knowledge if references were available at the end of the units in the course blocks and only 25.93% (7) were clear that references were available. Dickinson (1987) provides a checklist of the criteria that a good self-learning material must provide and sights reference materials as one of them. Only 70.37% (20) learners felt that the examples and illustrations in the SLM were appropriate. One of the basic ways that illustrations aid retention relates to the well-researched dual-coding theory of memory (Paivio, 1971). In the second research question the opinion of the stake holders on pacing, language and content of the instructional material was sought. The findings state that the pacing of the content in the SLM was slow as opined by 55.55% (15) learners. The study of Coldeway (1986) state that materials with correct pacing when presented to learners appears to have a positive effect on course completion rates. The coursework and delivery methods being same, those institutions that paced learner work were more successful at retaining distance learning learners. The learners also felt that the language in the self-learning material was simple which was opined by 40.74% (11) in most papers and totally simple by 22.2% (6). 44.44% (12) learners felt that the SLMs were able to cover major part of the syllabus. Availability of SLM in the expected medium was acknowledged by 51.85% (14) learners. All models of course development have varied implications on the cost, timeliness, effectiveness and quality of the materials produced (Panda, 2000). The researchers fail to throw any light on the model used by the Open University in developing the content material.

The third research question found the awareness of learners regarding the availability of SLM in disability friendly formats. Out of 27 (twenty seven) learners 29.63 % (8) learners reported that Self-learning materials are not available in disabled friendly formats like Braille or, talking books. 22.22% (6) learners believed that Self-learning materials are available in disabled friendly formats. And the rest either were not aware of its availability or thought it may be available. The result indicates that the learners are not sufficiently aware of the availability of material in disability friendly formats. Only eight learners had correct knowledge of the non-availability of the material in disability friendly formats. The knowledge is necessary as these learners will serve the field of special education in different positions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, complete learning packages and home study modules are definitely here to stay. Their use for either enrichment or remediation cannot be over-emphasized. This has been aptly stated in the study of Rastogi & Sahare, (2003) in which they claim that self-learning materials (SLM) strategy was more effective in raising level of comprehension and application. . Also, they help to rectify mistakes and maintain pace of learning. In overall the SLM which was under critical appreciation emerges with a positive shade. But, improvement can be sought with the introduction of SLM in disability friendly formats. The radio programs that are run can be increased by the institutions and further audio-visual programs and sessions can be added. The course content itself cannot be ignored in any theoretical or practical consideration of distance education attrition (Bullen, 1998). Learners lack in commitment and endeavor but with sparse work force in the field, each one who comes willingly must be embraced and motivation for further learning be provided.

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